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Dancing as Sustainably Being and Moving through the World

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Abstract

This chapter approaches sustainability from an educational and artistic angle, notably through the dance educator's gaze, as a contribution to conceptualizing sustainability education. In this, education and the arts generally are viewed as spaces for young people's efforts to enter into dialogue with the world – past, present and future. Providing space to work in an art mode like dance is seen as essential to education's existential remit, a task the chapter explores as owning a dimension of sustainability in itself, in terms of catering for a sensitive dialogue between the self and the natural and social world, calling for survival.

The chapter is written as an essay, tentatively conceiving dance teaching as aesthetic teaching and pleading for an aesthetic turn in education. At its core is the capability and willingness to be permeated, through the senses, by what the world offers. The dancing young person is seen as an agentive subject coming into being by submitting to movement and imagination, vulnerable and receptive to what comes from 'outside'. In the concept, teaching is seen as allowing the world with its phenomena to reveal itself aesthetically, offering its gifts and lending its heritage to us to take care of and live in balance with before passing it on to new generations.

In the chapter ethical and relational, existential and sustainability aspects of dance and education are brought to the fore, reminding us of what education essentially is all about, what dance as primordial interhuman and world-human interaction can teach us about these fundamentals, and, hopefully, what dancing together can teach us about sustainability education.

The arguments are informed by Gert Biesta's ideas on art as education, subject-ness and democracy in a world-oriented education, in dialogue with John Dewey's and Maxine Greene's thinking of art as experience, aesthetic literacy and education, and dance scholar and educator Susan Stinson's stances on dance education and dancing as becoming.

Keywords: Arts and education, dance education, aesthetic education, existential education, sustainability education, aesthetics and ethics, subjectification.

From fortress and warfare to world patrimony

Shaped by nature and human hand, the isles of Sveaborg are an impressive sight welcoming the waves from the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland before rolling in to the lively harbour of Helsinki. Sveaborg, Suomenlinna, before that Viapori, the official names of the eighteenth-century sea fortress reveal cultural-patriotic controversy. The landmark indeed bears witness to centuries of warfare, conquest and control – tendencies still waging force in our days.

New generations of visitors step ashore, Finnish and from overseas, like the author of this chapter, and take in the site's natural and architectural beauty and its nationalist history of bastion and prison. The islands no longer belong under the Ministry of Defense but under the Ministry of Education and Culture. What do we make of the site now? How does it inform us, tourists, school children, youths, local and global citizens? Can it 'teach' us something about sustainability, a multilayered term holding aspects of protection, preservation for posterity, peace and coexistence, and quality and equality in education (UN, 2024)? As a world heritage site, it is proclaimed a cultural and natural patrimony: an irreplaceable source of life and inspiration, of outstanding value to humanity (UNESCO, 2024). Can the site inspire us what to 'do' with it, with the world, with humanity?

These questions arose during and after my visit to the isles on a sunny, windy May Day's eve, generously guided through the sites by the SveaSus project leader. The initial question posed when invited into this book project was how dance and dance teaching may inform and enlighten the project's themes sustainability education, phenomenon-based learning and world heritage. This essay is indeed an attempt to formulate, far from a catch-all answer, some possibly illuminating reflections. I will zoom out and take a bird's-eye view on the site and this book's themes. I will contemplate what education largely is about, and how the arts and dance may matter in that context, to the student and to the world we share. In that, I will reflect on aesthetic and sustainability aspects of being in the social, cultural and natural world.

Meanwhile, the waves keep moving in from the seas and roll, lap, ripple, surge and break against the islands' rocks and wash the pebbles on its shores, before moving on to the busy harbour and the crystal city, and back again toward the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea and the oceans of the earth. On sunny days they evaporate into the clouds in an eternal cycle, on to the last days of the seas and the planet, who's lifetime has a natural limit, already measured as much closer than the Milky Way's. No need to pull the end point nearer yet, into our man-made Anthropocene, a disturbing state-of-the-art token of our present, too often self-centred, rather monologic dialogue with 'Mother Earth'. How well aware are we humans of our immensely more momentary perspective in the planet's existence? How do we move on?

We can move on wide awake, and wakefully stop and listen. We can move like dancers move, and come to stillness. As a mode of art, dance is a way of being in the world, trying to work out what it is to be in this world. Dancers literally *move* through the world, at the rhythm of its legacies of humankind and nature. Taken into the realm of education, which essentially is about young people's efforts to find a place in this world, I suggest a look at dance precisely as a way of dialoguing with it. A model, not a metaphor, but for real, a real channel for a 'worldly' dialogue, a sensuous one, with the world and its phenomena. Dancing and immersing in movement, I will probe, may be a way to attend to what comes toward us and to let the world appeal to us, ultimately for survival, socially and naturally.

Zooming in on the isles again, I will scrutinize if dancing-as-dialoguing can be a way to let a cultural and historic heritage site like Sveaborg speak to us. Can we get a hold of what it may want to 'teach us' about preservation, peace and prosperity? Can we dance and let the world of things and creatures, past and present, speak to us? Waves rolling ashore, salty weather bitten cliffs, soot and blood stained walls, rusty steel canons, watch towers, churches with or without bulbous domes whose bells have ringed, beacons whose lights have shone over waves and vessels, over revolutions and political executions, over communities swaying from oppression to democracy.

Finally, I will situate the potentiality of dance and the arts as dialoguing channels in conceiving a world-centred sustainability education. While the waves keep rocking the winds to rest, as they sing in *A Dreamplay* (Strindberg, 2008/1918/1902, p. 85).

Sustainability and the risk of objectifying education and the arts

Education is often expected to help solve urging societal and global challenges, like social exclusion, democratic deficiency, green transition and sustainability. The idea is that education straightens out differences and fosters an awareness of these issues in 'the young'. In this context of educational goal modelling or *programming*, the arts in turn are widely considered utterly suitable tools to help realise these strategies: as means to mediate urgent messages, or as ways to foster 'creative approaches' to the issues of our era. In times of crisis like ours, as writer and art curator Klougart (2024, p. 7) comments, the arts are expected to hastily come to our rescue altogether, coin a new ethic and work to create change in the actual world.

It is easy to sympathize with these hopeful scenarios and ambitions, appearing as self-evident and thoroughly deserving. But the picture is more complex. Questions need to be raised about this storyline and the roles allocated to education and the arts – and to young people in their education and engagement in the arts. Some fundamental aspects seem to be overlooked of what art and education are about.

Although artwork is not created isolated, but in radical exchange with the world and its ideas, it is essentially separate and independent: every painting, novel or sculpture is a world of its own, with its own meaning (Klougart 2024, p. 8). Insisting on keeping the aesthetic shielded not least from the political, is taking the aesthetic seriously and preserving the arts as independent modes of knowledge and insight – values in themselves. Dance, for instance, is something people *do* – or watch – and in the *doing* and experiencing of dance and its interactive quality as such lies its foremost significance, even when merely movement based: movement for its own sake, dance for dance's sake, art for art's sake. Besides, there is no evidence that practicing the arts in school caters for, say, a greater sense of creativity or creative thinking in students (Winner et al, 2013).

I will explore the value of dance in itself, and hence its possible educational quality. I will foreground existential aspects of dancing, and of education, dealing with the young individual's becoming as subject. Educationally spoken, the question asked is what 'just dancing' may 'teach' us, about being in the world, about education, about sustainability, and so on – without for that sake demanding tools or even answers from dance to solve specific issues of being in the world, like sustainability, or the care of a world cultural heritage like Sveaborg. On the other hand, if relating to the site evokes existential encounters, then the same question may be asked: What can this site teach me about what it is to be in this world? Or: In which way does it appeal to me as being a part of it and its history?

Asking these questions is entering into a dialogue with the site, a dialogue between subjects: me and this site, me and this particular world, part of the bigger world. Any utilitarian scenario laid upon this interplay runs the risk of objectifying education, the arts and the young person to what other agents expect and demand from them, subordinating them to a purpose or a programme defined by others as desirable or of true value.

Education as trying to exist in the world

What education and pedagogy fundamentally deal with, poses Biesta (2021, 2017a, 2017b, 2006), is the young person's ongoing efforts to enter into and maintain a dialogue with the world. As to the arts, they deal with queries into what it is to be in the world. To exist as subject, Biesta defines, is to be in the world in a grown-up way: not aspiring to be in

its centre but to be 'out there' with other subjects, unalike one-self, to exist in a world of plurality, also a precondition for democratic co-existence.

Teaching, Biesta (2021, 2017a, 2017b) pursues, is in its archetypical form about *pointing* at something out there in the world, something assumingly good, important and worthwhile paying attention to. The teacher's pointing gesture is profoundly pedagogical and therefore relational and situated, as it goes from this very teacher to this very pupil and that very something in the world that may be of significance. The pupil, eager for meaning, pays attention and steps forward as subject, or declines and stays behind as object. Thus, concludes Biesta (2017b, p. 63), the pedagogue's gesture, akin to the artist's: 'Look, there!', pointing at something to stop and reflect on, ultimately aims at turning the young person toward the world, in an attempt to arouse a longing to go out into the world and be there, not in its centre, but together with others – open to what the world may expect from one.

The latter alternative is an arduous path to walk, Biesta (2017b, p. 86-89) argues, as it interrupts the young person in their doings, bringing about disturbance and resistance, calling for a discernment as to which of one's desires and aspirations may be less or more desirable from the point of view of a world obviously unable to accommodate all our wishes – a world crying out that message vigorously. Above all, it is obviously a world where I am not alone. In return, the path is more rewarding and enlightening in the long run.

Education and dance as spaces of arrival into the world

When discussing existential dimensions of education, intersubjectivity is central. The child, the student, the teacher are seen as agents capable of acting and interacting with other agentive subjects. Biesta (2006, 2021) advocates an education not solely concerned with transferring predefined knowledge, proficiencies and a fixed set of values from one generation to the next, following a prescribed curriculum. He propounds an education concerned with the individual's *subject-ness* as a unique human being: a realm for the subject to break into the world.

We disclose our singularity and uniqueness, says Biesta (2006, pp. 50-52), in how we respond and give space to the Other. He refers to Emmanuel Levinas' (1969, 1987/1992) philosophy of alterity, seeing *the Other* as infinitely unknowable, not an *alter ego* but everything I am not. Assuming unconditional responsibility for the Other to emerge in all their otherness is how I emerge as subject – I am *for* the Other before I am by myself – a *self*. Biesta further leans on Arendt's (1977) thinking on the human capability to *act*: to take initiative, to launch an *initium*, a new beginning, like a new birth, bringing something new to the world. What we bring into the world is however not 'realised' until it is received by others. The subjective capability at stake thus comprises both the *subject*'s power to act and the readiness to *subject* to others' reactions to one's actions (Arendt 1954, p. 184).

Arendt defines freedom as the *freedom to act* and initiate new beginnings, which presupposes such intersubjective spaces. Arendt (1954, p.149) refers to the public space, preconditioned by plurality, in turn a precondition for democracy. Stressing that freedom dwells *in the act* – 'neither before nor after' – she refers to the performing arts (Arendt 1954, p. 153-154). There the accomplishment is not in an end product outlasting the initiative, but in the *performance* itself. Dancers and actors depend on each other's *re-actions* here and now and on an audience witnessing these momentary *acts*. These are revelatory acts, Arendt posits, as we essentially disclose our being by acting.

Biesta (2021, 2017b) concludes that not until school is a true space of otherness can it be a space where becoming as subject is made possible, and where democracy is made possible. Rather than education as the acquisition of predefined knowledge and internalization of predetermined values, he envisions an education ensuing from confrontation with the unexpected, from disturbance and strain, from responding to the unfamiliar and the uncommon, the otherwise and the Other. Education's first concern becomes the student's subject-ness and their solicitude to create contexts where they can bring their beginnings to the world and take place in the social fabric of difference with their thoughts and emotions, bringing their own, unique answers to the world.

As a mode of art, dance is a distinct way of being in the world. Dance educator and scholar Susan Stinson (1990, p. v) views dance as literally a way of being and *moving* through the world of things, creatures and ideas. Dance is tangible, corporeal action relating to the world outside the school, the studio, the stage. Dancers always move in relation – often in opposition – to prevailing views on the arts and dance: on who can dance, on body and gender, on knowledge and power, dance and education.

Contemporary dancers interact with the surrounding world through dance as an act of resistance against any objectification of the body, as a commercialised item, a lifestyle fetish, a projection surface for all kinds of aesthetic, social, political, gender and biological codes, or puppets moved around by choreographers. Philosopher and cultural theorist Boyan Manchev (2011) conceives an *aesthetics of resistance* to such manipulations, a rebirth of the body's original potentiality to explore experiences 'not yet one's own'. The dancer engages in corporeal, sensuous communication with other dancers as a *subject-body*, a window wide-open to the world.

So does the dancing child, says Stinson (1990, 1988), exploring the magic of movement and breaking into the world by force of imagination: a body eternally becoming as subject. Consequently, the dance teacher's mission is to provide space for such discovery and exploration, without given outcome, for freedom of trial, and for a process where all involved encounter themselves, each other and the surrounding world. Dancer and philosopher Erin Manning (2009, p. 6; 2014, p. 39) sees every movement as a beginning through which the very body comes into being, dancing 'the not-yet': body and dance coming into being. The images of the child dancing their way into the world and the dancer moving along with movement capture dance as open-ended, body-sensuous action and experience preceding cognition, consciousness and knowledge.

Aesthetic Experience

Experience as the outcome of the self's continuous transaction with the world is the core concept in pragmatist and progressive educationalist John Dewey's (1926) epistemology. Through continuous interplay with the surrounding world, Dewey claims, the individual gathers knowledge about what it is to be a human being, in an ongoing process of doing and undergoing, acting and subduing to the consequences of one's actions. Transaction turns into participation and communication of meaning, transforming both the self and the world.

In *Arts as Experience*, Dewey (1934) expands on the experience notion in aesthetic terms. The object of an *aesthetic experience* is a work of art, architecture, poetry, music or stage art which the beholder engages in and deepens into, trying to grasp its form and content – what it wants to convey. The interactions constituting the experience are situated, corporeal and social. They include sensation, cognition and consciousness, all of which Dewey sees as action: sens*ing*, mind*ing*, know*ing*. Through the work of the senses, the aesthetic permeates the experience from outside, from the artwork, in the intensifying and clarifying treats as the experience is consummated. A whole is created

from the particular and the disparate, converting resistance, tension, excitation and dissolvement into appreciation, fulfilment, participation and insight. An understanding evolves, meaning is communicated.

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1986, 1995, 2007) elaborates the notions aesthetic experience, communication and meaning making, and develops her ideas about aesthetic education: fostering through intense, receptive, reflective intercourse with the arts. Unfamiliar lines of thinking are probed, new ways of symbolizing and structuring experience, allowing the student to see, hear, feel and sense more, to make unexpected connections and investigate deeper levels of meaning. Spaces where such education can evolve, Greene argues, remind of Arendt's (1954) *public space*, presupposing the presence of others, appearing and revealing themselves in front of each other. Spaces for aesthetic education are spaces where growing human beings can come together and in the encounter with the arts initiate new beginnings through action and speech.

Dewey explores aesthetic experience in encounters with works of art, architecture or poetry, created by others. Greene promotes engagement in the raw material of arts: canvas, colours, poetry, bodies in motion – to move with dancers, balance one's weight, sense the *effort-shape* of an outflung arm – to more profoundly perceive what unfolds in a dance performance on stage. Both underline the achievement of a sense of wholeness encountering works of art – thereby overseeing the potential of what may remain open-ended. Neither treat aesthetic experiencing in *working* in the art modes as such.

Reasoning on what the arts may teach us, Biesta (2017b, pp. 87-89) deepens all the more into the student's engagement in *doing* artwork – and meeting resistance: 'the point at which education begins'. The encounter holds the premises for dialogue between 'self' and 'other', a process where we go out in the world and the world comes in to us. Resistance causes *disturbance*, *interruption* and s*uspension*, offering opportunities to confront limitations and sort out which of one's desires are more desirable than others when meeting the world. The teacher's mission is to encourage the student to linger in this difficult *middle ground* between going about too hard and raze, or shying away and refrain altogether – between destroying the world they try to exist in and self-destruction, obliterating their very existence in the world (Biesta 2017b, pp. 89-91).

The teacher's task is to 'stage' these encounters between the student and the world, and to support them to endure and cope with the labour it takes to step out into the world – literally to *exit* into the world. The aspiration is not to exist in the centre of the world, but to be there in dialogue, attentive to what the world may ask from one: a world-centred take on education rather than a student or curriculum oriented one (Biesta, 2021). The *middle ground,* Biesta (2017a, 2017b, 2021) underscores, is a thoroughly worldly, educational and existential space. It allows us to meet the world's realities as well as the realities and limits of our own existence. It especially teaches us that we are not alone. Working in the arts, meeting the realities of paint, stone, sound or body – in the British curriculum once called 'resistant materials' – offers golden opportunities to try out limits of ideas and aspirations and find out what it is to be in dialogue with the world. The arts, says Biesta, offer forms for this dialogue.

Kinaesthetic experience – finding meaning in movement

The dance teacher's rewarding task is to guide the young dancer through a rich repertoire of play and exercise, encourage imagination of movement and offer a bounty of opportunities to become *kinaesthetically aware.* Stinson (1988) calls it a sixth sense, and precisely what turns movement into dance: movement becomes significant, is literally *given* significance, by *attending* to it. Kinaesthesia comes from Greek *kiné* – to set in

motion – and *aesthesis* – sensation. It underscores power of action, to *initiate* movement, as well as the capability to sensuously *experience* movement, one's own or others'. It brings a *kinetic* dimension to Dewey's aesthetic experience concept, a dynamic and corporeal aspect of *doing* and *undergoing*.

Kinaesthetic experience, says Stinson (2016), is the sensuous internalization of movement through which we can sense other people's dance and our response to it. We become participants, we breathe with those we see dancing, we feel the stretch extending from fingertips, we 'sense' a body softly landing after a leap. Or, as postmodern dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham (1955) puts it: to just stand still and with timely means condense the sensation of *movement action*.

Looking back at her work after years of teaching dance, Stinson (2016), realised she had not really explored the wonderful world of dance with the children. She had taught them to be *like* something: seeds growing to be flowers, wild horses galloping, ice cream melting. They told stories: witch dances, storm dances, battle dances, dances about boats and airplanes. Why didn't they dance *dances*? They busied themselves with *ideas* rather than with the potential of ideas *for movement*. Stinson realised she had circumvented the art of dance. Taught stuff dance can relate to, but is not dance in itself: the eternal claim on the arts' causal or representing value. She went back to mere movement, not *fiction*. To the experience of flinging out with an arm or boxing with the knees. It caught on among the children and proved to be at least as exciting as wild horses or pirates. Now they learned about dance and movement, about their bodies and themselves. Now it was for *real*, not fabricated. Now they could *let themselves go* and fantasize about Ms. Knee and Mr. Elbow flying up in the air, and exploring those movements taught the children more about dance than ever images of flying witches and dragons had.

Kinaesthetic experiencing is the active-passive part of working in the dance art mode, and, in Biesta's (2017b) terms, a specific 'channel' for dialogue between the self and the world. To create space in education for kinaesthetic experiencing is to create space for young dancers to literally, in front of our eyes, leap forward into the world as subjects.

Dancing as moving and becoming in the real world

For a long time, Stinson (2016, p. 88) tried to formulate the interrelationship between the ethical and the aesthetic dimensions of human existence in relation to dance education. After a walk break in writing, she lay down to rest and came upon the theoretical framework for her research. It appeared to be all about the difference between the body's vertical and horizontal positions. The upright posture stands for activity, power of action, control, mastery – to be *on top* – the extended posture stands for passivity, receptiveness, docility – to be *with* others.

Biesta (2017b, p. 106-112) refers to Roth's (2011) *passibility* concept: the capability to be affected through the senses, central in daily experience. It denotes a capacity to move and to be moved, a sense for motion and emotion, a blend of agency and radical passivity, a willingness to let oneself be permeated through the senses by the not-yet-known and the unknowable: an aesthetic capacity preceding cognition and knowing. In dance, this capability to be sensuously affected can be translated as the capacity to sense movement, to be *moved* by movement. It is at the core of kinaesthetic experiencing and may help understand what dance can teach us.

We can link Roth's notion *passibility* – also a term in Christian theology, referring to the susceptibility to sensation and passion, derived from Latin *pati*, to *suffer* – with Stinson's extended posture as being and moving with others, and to Levinas' stances on

assuming responsibility for the Other's vulnerability. Levinas (2003, p. 63) denotes vulnerability as a passivity more passive than all passivity', which he locates entirely in the body, 'a nakedness more naked than the naked of skin'. Taking responsibility calls for an assertion and a receptivity for the Other's vulnerability.

Levinas (1987/1992) thinks of the Other as a *face* emerging, not metaphorically, but in the flesh: a living face approaching and calling on me. I can choose to smash, slay and annihilate it, or submit to its vulnerability. By letting the Other call upon me and engage in dialogue – command and privilege – I encounter myself as an *I*. Ethics precede the ego: I am *for the Other* before I am *by myself* – a *self*. The encounter with the Other unfolds in proximity, in conversation, by listening and speaking, with body language, facial expression, glances: The eye that sees is essentially in a body which is also hand and ear, creating speech and action (Levinas, 1996, p. 14); a bodily gesture is no discharge in the nerves, but a celebration of life, poetry (Ibid., p. 16). When students share their dancing experiences in education they emphasize the interplay, described as 'wordless', 'tender' 'dialogue between bodies', being 'vulnerably exposed', 'standing naked', building a feeling of community and closeness (Moerman, 2014).

This touches upon the radical power and potential of dance in education. Kinaesthetic experiencing presupposes the ability to sense and surrender to movement, to move along with an arm's swing, to follow the motion and let the arm, the shoulder, the torso, the hip be affected by the move, to let it twist and take a turn in a new direction, and on, and on, before thought enters and steers the next gesture or step. Watching a couple of preschool children dance together in a spontaneous session, it is impossible to see who is steering and who is following. We see young dancers interacting and coming into being as subjects through initiative and response – in pure movement – creating their own undeniable meaning.

Various field studies (Anttila, 2003; Lindqvist 2010; Moerman, 2014) on dance in education establish how children and students experience a heightened level of presence, perception, attention and receptiveness, while witnessing a clear existential awareness. Imagination of movement spurs on to new movement, yielding participants to enter what Greene (1986) calls 'as if' worlds, 'vanishing' into spaces where they discover unexpected skills, and see their peers and themselves in a new light.

Biesta (2017b) rejects such ideas of 'imaginary' worlds and strongly argues that what happens in dance is for real. What we face working in an art mode like dance is the real world of bodies, the real world of others, where we meet ourselves: an existential encounter. In the same manner Cunningham (1952) describes flows of dance movements evolving in time and space as continua of disparate elements interplaying and creating sequences of movements 'fully visible to anybody': dance is the most realistic of things occurring on a stage.

This essay on dance and what dance possibly can 'teach' us about education and in extension about sustainability education reasons in this sphere of the realistic and the existential. It is about providing spaces of becoming, spaces for the young individual to 'arrive' in the world as subject, as an 'I': what Biesta (2021, p. 58) describes as the existential remit of education. These arrivals in the world must indeed not be interpreted metaphorically, as little as Arendt's public space is a figure, or as little as Levinas' encounter with the face is a metaphor. These are real beginnings, unfolding in the real world, social and natural. Dance brings this to a head, as it occurs in the flesh, on the floor, between dancers, and between dancers and spectators, however ephemeral the movement performed – or precisely just because of the transiency of dance movement. These 'breakthroughs' into the world presuppose an unconditional respect for the subject's

freedom to act. It is the only guarantee, artistically and educationally, for an 'I' to break through again and again.

The question asked here is what may 'take place' when young people in education come together and dance at a specific cultural historic site, or in a context relating to it. On a quay, a shore, a former jail courtyard, inside or outside a church, a barrack or a museum, in front of a king's gate, back in school after a visit. The answer is not for the teacher or the school to determine. What if the group of young dancers engage in 'just dance'?

In her reasoning on 'real' movement versus illustrative dance, Stinson (1990) poses that if fantasy and metaphor lead to awareness of movement, movement is the first consideration. Then suggestions may be helpful, when dancing in the context of a naval fortress: 'Drop dead as if you were struck by lightning' – or 'hit by a cannon ball'. Or: 'Move together like a stormy wave', 'Cup your hand gently as if you caught a grain of dust whirling in from overseas, from another age. The point is not to *ban* images of seagulls or soldiers in eighteenth century fortifications, or aspects of ecological sustainability. It is about not *confining* the sensation of dancing at a gallop by tying it to the world of animals. It is about avoiding representation and reproduction of clichés, which is reducing and objectifying. How *this* child and *this* teenager moves in *this* or *that* context is how they emerge as dancing individuals coming into being as subjects: how *they* find themselves interacting with the site.

An Aesthetic Phenomenology of Teaching

Crucial in creating space in school for dance and the arts is to allow space for the unfamiliar, the otherwise, the unpredictable, for new, unexpected perspectives of being in the world – ultimately for what the world may offer as 'gifts'. Discussing the phenomenology of teaching, Biesta (2021, p. 58-74) indeed speaks of 'gifts' of teaching. The common order is what he coins 'learnification' (Biesta 2006, 2021), reducing education to 'learning' as acquiring and constructing knowledge, reducing the pupil to a 'learner' and the teacher to a 'learning facilitator', a coach by the sideline, if at all involved in the 'learning process'. A politics marketizing and economizing education, turning schools into knowledge factories or stores competing for 'learners', and ultimately objectifying the world as a stockpile of exploitable resources.

Instead, Biesta (2006, 2021) calls for an education 'beyond learning', freeing teaching from result-oriented learning and bringing the 'I' of the student into play. At the core of the question of the 'I' is the subject's freedom. Any tendency to control learning processes and outcomes, anticipating possible situations and occurrences, jeopardizes this freedom, by sticking to the predetermined and keeping away from the unexpected and the unpredicted. With philosopher Jean-Luc Marion (2017), Biesta (2021, p. 67) insists not everything can be foreseen, least of all what may be appraised as unknowable, lest we want to be in control – an attitude in teaching that also obliterates chances for the student to surprise the teacher.

The opposite teaching order is to allow scope to see without foreseeing, to be 'summoned' to experience what may be there, ready to give itself to me: a subjectification of me experiencing and of that what offers the experience – of the experience itself. Levinas (1969, p. 51) calls this order of receiving what is infinitely beyond my capacity to grasp 'to be taught'. It implies receptiveness and risk-taking, a readiness to subject myself to what comes my way, including things I did not ask for or did not even know I could ask for. To subject myself is to be 'subjectified', that is, to be confronted with my 'subject-ness' (Biesta, 2021, p.67). This order turns school and education into places of revelation, Biesta (2021, p. 71) claims, a realm beyond my horizon of understanding, with

a potential to strike with a sudden new insight. More than I may wish to learn about the world, the world is trying to give itself to me, a givenness preceding my attempts to grab hold of the world.

Phenomenologically and existentially, this order situates perceivable things before the 'I'. Marion (2002, p. 322) contests the idea of the 'subject' as an ego, a first person 'holding' the centre, where what gives itself shows itself in itself, an 'I' thinking and constituting the 'given'. Reversed, I am 'held' there, a recipient disclosing myself given to, a 'gifted': receiving what is immeasurably and incessantly given to me, and whose privilege is confined to me myself being received from what I receive. A radical step in phenomenology, in line with Levinas' (1969, p. 51) thinking on the subject 'being taught': meeting the infinitely unknowable Other's face I receive 'more than I can contain'.

Levinas (1987/1992) poses that assuming responsibility for the Other precedes my being as subject: I am for the other before I am a Self. Biesta (2021, p. 54) aligns with Levinas' (1969) view on responsibility as something coming my way, interrupting me, summoning 'me', and endorses Levinas' call for a shift from the 'ego-logical' to the eco-logical – from the self-centred to the world-cantered (Biesta 2021, p. 49). Marion (2002, p. 323) equals receiving the Other to receiving a *given*, and receiving oneself from it: a *gifted* shows oneself, therefore *gives* oneself, to another *gifted*; it no longer concerns intersubjectivity or interobjectivity, but intergivenness.

What we encounter in the world as 'given' and signify through 'illumination', Levinas (2003/1972, p. 9-12) explores in bodily terms: The body is a *sensing sensed*: sens*ed*, it is located at the side of the subject, sens*ing*, it is on the side of objects; it thus combines the subjectivity of perception and the objectivity of expression, creating language, poetry, dance – all endeavours illuminating and signifying the 'given'. "To perceive […] is to receive and express at the same time. By gesture we are able to imitate the visible and *kinaesthetically* coincide with the gesture *seen*; in perception *our* body is also the 'delegate' of *Being*" (Levinas, 2003/1972, p. 16, original italics). The living/lived body, sensuously affected in encounters with the world, Roth (2011, p. 17) claims, is aware of being able to be further affected, without mediation of a conscious mind, and, willing to move on and be further affected, changes and develops.

Concluding this brief and incomplete phenomenological elaboration I thus return to Roth's *passibility* concept, the capacity to be affected by what comes to me through the senses, that what gives itself to my hearing and to my seeing. As a dancer I translate the notion into a readiness to move and be moved by movement, my own and others'. Dancing, I am 'summoned' as an 'I' by the movements coming my way as 'gifts'. To lend an ear and open an eye is to give attention to what is given to me, a *responsal*, a first 'Here I am!' (see Marion 2002, p. 288). To pay attention to movement is my first response as subject-body. The dynamic of doing and undergoing movement constitutes (kin)aesthetic experience – in an updated Deweyan take on experience, open-ended, 'beyond consummation' into an assumed whole.

Beyond Teaching: Aesthetic Education for a Worldly Future

From my dance teacher's perspective, this dynamic inspires a concept of *aesthetic teaching,* a vision 'beyond teaching', calling for an aesthetic education for a worldly future. *Pointing* as the archetypical gesture of teaching, as proclaimed by Biesta (2017a, 2017b, 2021), goes from the teacher to the pupil and the aspect of the world pointed out as worthwhile paying attention to. The figure also describes *the didactic triangle*, coined by Herbart (2017/1902). The pointing gesture aims at turning the pupil toward the world, and initiates an invitation into the realm of meaning making. It is the teacher's task to

make the invitation tempting. They can apply a range of didactic means on the one hand, following the common order of controlled instruction. But the dialogical work can also be 'subjected' to the work of the senses, by rendering the teacherly work an essentially aesthetic dimension. Biesta (2024) stresses, with Herbart, that in order to get a response to the invitation from the student, and for it to truly be the student's own and free response, the (re)presentation of the world needs to be aesthetic.

The line of reasoning 'beyond teaching' I propose evolves in terms of the teacher trying to awaken a desire in the young person to turn to the world and to be there as subject in dialogue with the world-as-subject, open to 'subject' to the world's gifts. The receptiveness at stake is neither passive nor primarily cognitive. As teachers know, the work is laborious. It goes, as Biesta (2017a, 2017b, 2021) says, through resistance, interruption and delay, even suffering, and the pupil may need support to linger in this difficult, vulnerable middle-ground between the self and the world, between self-destruction and world-destruction. Biesta (2017b, p. 80-81) claims that working in the arts shows such paths to dialogue with the world, if we let the arts 'teach' us. Through the work of the head, the hand and the heart we meet the world, and meet ourselves in the world. Facing limitations of bodily movement caters for such encounters.

Through the years, my practice teaching creative dance as well as dance integrated in subject teaching (Moerman, 2014, 2016, 2018) has borne numerous testimonies to the nature and power of this sensory work. Of young people dancing together, appearing in front of each other, indulging in kinaesthetics, meeting each other anew and building fragile relationships, ethical and existential, imbued by proximity, trust, participation and communication, 'wordless dialogues of giving and taking' (Moerman, 2014). In creative dance, with no other end or meaning than exploring dance and movement's own meaning, the work evolves by subjecting to the (kin)aesthetic.

Similarly, in dancing language, math and science (Moerman, 2025), the didactic triangle is 'staged' by dance as kinaesthetic experiencing. The (kin)aesthetic precedes the cognitive. Not only does this order lower thresholds to take in subject matter which many perceive as difficult. As shown above and as Roth (2011) emphatically argues, contesting the constructivist model of 'learning' language, math and science, the ability to be affected through the senses is how we encounter and *receive* the world, before interpreting; *passibility* paves the way to cognition. Dance opens onto a world of knowledge.

My tentative synthesis is to suggest that dance creates spaces in education for kinaesthetic experiencing, and a forum for initiative and docility in movement. From both perspectives a dynamic evolves of doing and undergoing, of interaction, participation and communication of movement – and possible meaning. The kinaesthetic experience is literally rendered *body* as body, movement and body-subject come into being, by receiving what is given, by being 'gifted'.

To Biesta teaching is about turning the pupil to the social and natural world and arousing a desire to be there, in and with the world. Dance, with its immediate kinaesthetic power and call for responsiveness, prompts us to let go of the familiar and step into the unknown and the unforeseeable: an educational opportunity. In the open-ended, laborious and joyous creative dance work, play and joy of discovery blend with vulnerability and the experience of resistance in meeting the unknown and the other. A meeting with the *not-knowing* in a broad sense, opening for interruption and suspension, for dialogue, for being with others, and, thus receiving the world's gifts, break into the world as a self.

Dance, sustainability education and the world as a heritage

In this essay about dance and education I have brought aesthetic and existential aspects to the fore. The questions I posed is what dance can 'teach' us about being in the world, about being in and with the world in a sustainable way for oneself and the social and natural world, and what dance eventually may teach children, students and teachers encountering the natural and cultural world of Sveaborg.

I made a point that in a utilitarian take on education and the arts, as tools to raise awareness or find creative solutions to societal and ecological problems, the individual as well as education, and the world, are at risk of being objectified. Working in the arts in educational settings must unroll in the young person's full freedom and integrity, allowing them to achieve their subject-ness, to bring their 'I' to the world. Dancing and handling resistance – and inspiring joy – in movement, bodily limitations, limits of time, space and force, dancing emerges as an act of open-ended, inquiring dialogue with the world, allowing for existential encounters.

In the context of striving for a better future for the world, social and natural, I made a plea for an aesthetic turn in education 'beyond teaching'. In teaching-as-pointing as relational, situated and triangular dialogue between teacher, student and the world, I propound a view on dance as (kin)aesthetic interplay bringing the didactic triangle to life. By subduing and yielding to movement and the senses, the young dancer opens wide up to the world and what the world offers as gifts. Teaching becomes less controlled, more open-ended. 'Learning' becomes less of 'grabbing' knowledge out in the world, more of connecting to the world, even beyond the predicted and the expected, possibly to more than one is capable of 'grasping'..

(Kin)aesthetic experiencing unfolds as pre-cognitive, pre-emotional, sensuous, receptive dialogue between phenomena as 'gifts' and young dancers, receiving these gifts, becoming as subjects again and again. Dance, I suggest, can provide these indispensable, protected spaces in education for the young to probe and act upon their freedom, allowing the world and its gifts their freedom. Dance amounts to an aesthetic act of resistance to all objectification and manipulation. Only as subjects of their own lives can the young act upon what may appear beneficial in their strivings for a better existence for themselves and the world.

Maybe this is where *sustainabilities* meet: educational sustainability, ecological, social and cultural sustainability (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020): an aesthetic, educational and existential model to keep the dialogue with the world alive, urging us again and again to ask the world, in all its complexity, all its opportunity of choices and all its gifts it is ready to give us, what that world may expect and want from us. Dance itself is transforming dialogue stripped from any technical utility, down to the 'naked' human body-subject interacting with a world of others and other in vulnerable, powerful aesthetic and ethical interaction. Dance mediates the eternal value and meaning of mere movement – as eternal as the infant trying to roll over or the waves rolling back and forth through the Finnish archipelago, as eternal as ephemeral.

Again, there is nothing mystical about this. As Cunningham (1952) states, dance is essentially about every single instance as it occurs, and dance's life and force lies precisely in this particularity. Dance is just as explicit and transient as breathing, as the breaths of winds brushing over cliffs and fortresses, carrying vessels and rocking the waves. Dance education, from early childhood, is about handling physical and abstract elements like body, space, time, force and relationships, a hands-on work, says Stinson (1988, p. 4), through which children see that these things exist in dance, and in the world around. They can dance slowly like clouds do, they can move swiftly like the winds do. Dancing and interplaying with the world, they get to know themselves. Dance 'teaches' us to move through and along with the world of things and creatures – living, past, future.

So, asked what dance can 'do' in this context of sustainability education and cultural world heritage, my primary and modest response is to resist the claim to provide answers and solutions. To stay faithful to the dance art mode and to urge to 'just' dance and let dance illuminate these questions about being in the world; to dance and be present moving through the world; to dance and hear the waves and the winds sweeping over the isles on and on, for ages, since long before a stone was put on a stone; to listen to the waves whispering about whales and seagulls, war and peace, revolution and summary execution; to listen to the breezes and storms eternally blowing over Sveaborg.

So let children and students dance and connect to each other, and let the world in which we all exist reveal itself to our senses and offer its gifts for us to receive and cherish. Dance and take in what this site can offer and tell about our existence in this world. That dance can teach, if we let dance teach.

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